

## Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 TEL AV 04627 01 OF 03 250728Z  
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07  
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15  
USIA-06 IO-13 SSM-03 ACDA-07 COME-00 EB-07 LAB-04  
SIL-01 OMB-01 TRSE-00 DHA-02 /094 W  
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P R 241436Z JUN 77  
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6896  
INFO AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 TEL AVIV 4627

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PINT, ELAB, IS  
SUBJECT: ASSESSMENT OF THE HISTADRUT ELECTION

1. SUMMARY: THE LIKUD VICTORY IN THE MAY KNESSET ELECTION SEEMED TO MANY TO MARK THE END OF THE ANCIENT REGIME AND THE DAWN OF THE SECOND REPUBLIC OF ISRAEL. HOWEVER, THE REMARKABLE AND UNEXPECTED ABILITY OF THE LABOR MOVEMENT TO RECUPERATE AND RETAIN MAJORITY CONTROL OF THE HISTADRUT (ON THE BASIS OF OVER 900,000 VOTES CAST OR MORE THAN HALF OF THE NUMBER OF VOTERS IN THE KNESSET ELECTION) NOW APPEARS TO HAVE QUALIFIED LIKUD'S POPULAR MANDATE. THUS, WHILE THE KNESSET ELECTION GAVE LIKUD CONTROL OVER PARLIAMENTARY POLITICS, THE HISTADRUT ELECTION WILL ENABLE LABOR TO CONTINUE DOMINATING EXTRA-PARLIAMENTARY POLITICS IN ISRAEL.

2. ALTHOUGH BOTH THE NEW GOVERNMENT AND THE LABOR PARTY LEADERSHIP HAVE PUBLICLY PROMISED TO AVOID CONFRONTATION, THERE IS CONSIDERABLE PRESSURE WITHIN HISTADRUT AND THE LABOR PARTY TO TEST BEGIN AND HIS GOVERNMENT'S STAYING POWER THROUGH CONFRONTATION. THE INITIATIVE FOR A CONFRONTATION COMES PARTICULARLY FROM THE KIBBUTZ  
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PAGE 02 TEL AV 04627 01 OF 03 250728Z

MOVEMENT, THE MAPAM, AND THE YOUNG GUARDS WHOSE TREMENDOUS ORGANIZATIONAL EFFORTS DURING THE HISTADRUT ELECTION CAMPAIGN WERE LARGELY RESPONSIBLE FOR LABOR'S RECOVERY. HOWEVER, MORE MODERATE LABOR PARTY FORCES WOULD LIKE TO BRING THE DMC INTO A NEW ALLIANCE IN THE HISTADRUT, PARTLY TO COUNTERBALANCE THE INFLUENCE OF THE MORE MILITANT GROUPS AND PARTLY TO PREVENT DMC FROM

JOINING THE LIKUD IN EFFORTS TO REDUCE THE POWER AND THE INFLUENCE OF THE HISTADRUT BY LEGISLATION AND FISCAL MEASURES.

3. THESE FORCES ALSO SEE A POSSIBILITY OF FORMING A NEW CENTER-LEFT POLITICAL GROUPING WHICH MAY SOMEDAY ATTRACT THE LIBERALS AWAY FROM LIKUD, IF BEGIN'S POLICIES FAIL. TO GIVE SUCH MANEUVERS A CHANCE THEY FEEL THAT THEY MUST DROP MAPAM AND SOME OF THE LABOR PARTY'S LEFT WING IDEOLOGICAL BAGGAGE. HOWEVER, MAPAM AND LABOR'S LEFT ARE NOW TRYING VERY HARD TO BLOCK THESE MANEUVERS AND TO KEEP DMC OUT. FOR THE INTERMEDIATE FUTURE, PROSPECTS ARE THAT THE NEW GOVERNMENT WILL FIND IT RATHER DIFFICULT TO DEAL WITH THE HISTADRUT AND LABOR AND PRICE-WAGE QUESTIONS, UNTIL THE POWER STRUGGLE WITHIN THE LABOR PARTY AND THE HISTADRUT HAS BEEN STABILIZED AND THE RELATIVE STRENGTH OF THE GOVERNMENT AND LABOR WILL HAVE BECOME CLARIFIED. END SUMMARY.

4. ALTHOUGH THE FINAL OFFICIAL RESULTS OF THE HISTADRUT ELECTION ARE NOT YET AVAILABLE, IT IS CLEAR (A) THAT THE ALIGNMENT WILL RETAIN ITS ABSOLUTE MAJORITY, (B) THAT THE PROPORTION OF VOTES SUPPORTING LABOR (INCLUDING THE LABOR-ALIGNED RELIGIOUS WORKERS) DECLINED BY ABOUT 7 PERCENT OVER 1973 (AS COMPARED TO 40 PERCENT

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PAGE 03 TEL AV 04627 01 OF 03 250728Z

IN THE KNESSET ELECTION), AND (C) THAT IF THE DMC AND ILP-CR VOTES ARE ADDED TO THE ALIGNMENT VOTE, THE RESULT COULD BE CONSTRUED AS EVEN A 5 PERCENT GAIN OF SUPPORT FOR A CENTER-LEFT POSITION FAVORING THE ESSENTIAL PRESERVATION OF THE STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONS OF THE HISTADRUT. VOTERS' PARTICIPATION WAS 65 PERCENT OF 1,370,000 MEMBERS COMPARED WITH 68 PERCENT IN 1973.

5. WITH 92 PERCENT OF THE VOTE COUNTED, THE ALIGNMENT HAD OBTAINED 54.6 PERCENT (58.3 IN 1973), LIKUD 28.8 PERCENT (22.7), DMC 8.2 PERCENT, RELIGIOUS WORKERS 1.8 (4.3), RAKAH 3.0 PERCENT (2.4), SHELLI 1.0 PERCENT (2.0), ILP-CR 1.3 PERCENT (6.0). AN INSIGNIFICANT 1.3 PERCENT OF THE VOTES WENT TO LISTS WHICH WERE UNABLE TO ATTAIN THE REQUIRED MINIMUM TO QUALIFY FOR REPRESENTATION. LIKUD OBVIOUSLY DID NOT DO AS WELL AS EXPECTED ON THE BASIS OF ITS KNESSET VICTORY, BUT ITS 26 PERCENT GAIN IN AN ALIGNMENT CONTROLLED ORGANIZATION CANNOT BE CONSIDERED INSIGNIFICANT.

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 04627 02 OF 03 250719Z  
ACTION NEA-10

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INFO AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 3 TEL AVIV 4627

6. THE VIRTUAL DISAPPEARANCE OF THE SMALLER PARTIES INDICATES THAT THEIR VOTERS SHIFTED THEIR SUPPORT TO THE ALIGNMENT, PRINCIPALLY TO EXPRESS A COMMON OPPOSITION TO THE PROCLAIMED SOCIAL-ECONOMIC POLICIES OF THE LIKUD RATHER THAN AN ENDORSEMENT OF THE ALIGNMENT. A TRADE UNION ELECTION VERDICT OBVIOUSLY CANNOT SUPPORT THE EXAGGERATED LABOR CLAIMS THAT THE HISTADRUT VOTE SUBSTANTIALLY NEGATES OR MODIFIES THE LIKUD MANDATE OF THE KNESSET ELECTION, ESPECIALLY SINCE ONLY HALF AS MANY VOTERS VOTED IN THE HISTADRUT ELECTION AS VOTED IN THE KNESSET ELECTION. JUST AS OBVIOUSLY, ALIGNMENT LEADERS WISHING TO MAGNIFY THEIR UNEXPECTED SUCCESS, WILL SEEK TO PRESENT IT AS AN ATTEMPTED REVERSAL OF THE EARLIER RESULT.

7. ANALYTICAL INFORMATION PROVIDED TO EMBASSY BY POLLSTER MINA ZEMACH SHOWED THAT 18 PERCENT OF THE HISTADRUT MEMBERS WHO HAD VOTED FOR LIKUD IN THE KNESSET ELECTION SHIFTED TO LABOR IN THE HISTADRUT ELECTION WHILE 23 PERCENT ABSTAINED. IN EFFECT, THE GENERAL INCREASE OF ABSTENTION IN THE HISTADRUT ELECTION APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN LARGELY DUE TO THE ABSTENTION BY ERSTWHILE LIKUD VOTERS. THIS DESPITE THE FACT THAT ONLY ONE WEEK EARLIER SOME  
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PAGE 02 TEL AV 04627 02 OF 03 250719Z

60 PERCENT OF THE HISTADRUT MEMBERS HAD EXPRESSED SATISFACTION OVER THE LIKUD VICTORY. ALSO NOTEWORTHY

IS THAT 32 PERCENT OF THE HISTADRUT MEMBERS WHO HAD VOTED FOR DMC IN THE KNESSET ELECTION SUPPORTED THE ALIGNMENT IN THE HISTADRUT ELECTION. MOREOVER, AS THE LATEST RESULTS INDICATE, LIKUD WAS UNABLE TO CAPTURE A MAJORITY IN ANY MAJOR LABOR COUNCIL, WITH LABOR NOW HAVING PULLED AHEAD OF LIKUD EVEN IN ASHDOD. AT THE SAME TIME, A HIGH PERCENTAGE OF THE SEPHARDIC VOTE IN SLUM AREAS AND DEVELOPMENT TOWNS, WHICH IN 1973 HAD GONE TO LABOR, NOW SUPPORTED LIKUD, WHEREAS IN NON-SEPHARDIC AREAS AND IN THE ARAB SECTOR (55 PERCENT OF ARABS VOTED LABOR AGAINST 12 PERCENT IN THE KNESSET ELECTION) A SHARP BACKLASH REACTION TO THE LIKUD GOVERNMENT HELPED SUSTAIN THE ALIGNMENT VICTORY. THE DIFFICULTY OF THE POLLS TO PREDICT THE HISTADRUT AS WELL AS THE KNESSET ELECTION FULLY REFLECTED THE VOTERS' DILEMMA IN MAKING A CHOICE AS WELL AS A PROFOUND FEAR OF BASIC CHANGE. THIS PHENOMENON WOULD ALSO SUPPORT THE ALIGNMENT CLAIMS THAT THE FORMATION OF THE LIKUD GOVERNMENT ON THE EVE OF THE HISTADRUT ELECTION HAD A SIGNIFICANT LAST MINUTE EFFECT OF REINFORCING THE BACKLASH TREND (REFTEL).

8. PROSPECT FOR HISTADRUT-GOVERNMENT RELATIONS. THE DAY AFTER THE HISTADRUT ELECTION, PRIME MINISTER BEGIN GRACEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGED THE ALIGNMENT VICTORY IN THE HISTADRUT, OFFERED GOVERNMENT-LABOR-EMPLOYER NEGOTIATIONS ON AN ECONOMIC PACKAGE DEAL, AND APPEALED FOR GOVERNMENT-HISTADRUT COOPERATION RATHER THAN CONFRONTATION. AT THE SAME TIME HE ALSO WARNED THAT THE HISTADRUT ELECTION SHOULD NOT BE CONFUSED WITH THE MANDATE OF THE GOVERNMENT RESULTING FROM CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 TEL AV 04627 02 OF 03 250719Z

THE KNESSET ELECTION, WHICH MUST BE CONSIDERED AS OVERRIDING. IN AN EARLIER FRIENDLY EXCHANGE FINANCE MINISTER ERHLICH JOKINGLY TOLD HISTADRUT SECRETARY GENERAL MESHEL THAT THE HISTADRUT MIGHT BE SURPRISED AND FIND HIM EASIER TO NEGOTIATE WITH THAN RABINOWITZ; MESHEL RETORTED THAT EHRlich MIGHT FIND MESHEL EASIER TO DEAL WITH THAN LIKUD CANDIDATE DAVID LEVY. MESHEL HIMSELF REPEATED ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS THAT HE WOULD PREFER NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE GOVERNMENT TO CONFRONTATION.

9. DESPITE THESE EFFORTS TO REASSURE THE PUBLIC AT THIS STAGE, THE PROSPECTS FOR ACCOMMODATION REMAIN HIGHLY UNCERTAIN SINCE HISTADRUT-GOVERNMENT RELATIONS WILL NOT BE SUBJECT ONLY TO THE CONTROL OF THE NEW PRIME MINISTER AND MESHEL. UNDOUBTEDLY THE GOVERNMENT WILL BE CAUTIOUS AND TRY TO DELAY MEASURES LIKELY TO BE CONSIDERED PROVOCATIVE BY THE HISTADRUT, AND

MESHEL WILL ALSO SEEK TO DELAY CONFRONTATION. HOWEVER, WHETHER THE TWO LEADERS CAN REALLY CONTROL THE DEVELOPING SCENARIO REMAINS TO BE SEEN. IF IMMOBILISM AS A RESULT PLAGUES THE LABOR GOVERNMENT, WHOSE LINES OF AUTHORITY WERE RATHER DIFFUSE, THE AUTHORITARIAN AND PRESIDENTIAL SYTEL OF BEGIN IS LIKELY TO CREATE EVEN MORE SERIOUS BOTTLENECKS IN FORMULATING AND IMPLEMENTING POLICY DECISIONS. THIS COULD BECOME PARTICULARLY SERIOUS IN DOMESTIC AFFAIRS LEADING TO ADDITIONAL LABOR AND SOCIAL UNREST SINCE BEGIN'S ATTENTION WILL BE FOR SOME TIME ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY DEVOTED TO FOREIGN AFFAIRS. TESTS WILL SOON ARISE OVER DEVALUATION, PRICE-WAGE NEGOTIATIONS, SUBSIDIES, VAT, COMPULSORY ARBITRATION, PENSION PLANS AND HEALTH INSURANCE. AND NEITHER BEIGN AND EHRLICH NOR MESHEL AND PERES MAY HAVE A FREE HAND TO NEGOTIATE ONLY ON THE BASIS OF MERIT.

10. PROBLEMS WITHIN HISTADRUT AND THE LABOR PARTY.  
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 TEL AV 04627 02 OF 03 250719Z

THE UNEXPECTED SUCCESS OF THE ALIGNMENT IN THE HISTADRUT ELECTION PRESERVES UNDER LABOR CONTROL THE ONE ORGANIZATION WHICH CAN EFFECTIVELY CHALLENGE OR MODIFY GOVERNMENT POLICY AND PROJECTS MESHEL INTO THE POTENTIALLY MOST POWERFUL POSITION CONTROLLED BY THE LABOR PARTY. IN THIS POSITION HE WILL BE ALMOST CERTAINLY CHALLENGED BY THE NOW LARGELY UNEMPLOYED LABOR PARTY LEADERSHIP WHICH IS BOUND TO BEGRUDGE THIS MAN, WHOM MANY CONSIDER AS ONLY A SECOND RATE LEADER, HIS POWERFUL POSITION. HE, IN TURN, HOWEVER, CAN CLAIM THAT IT WAS UNDER HIS LEADERSHIP THAT LABOR REVERSED ITS DECLINE AND

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 04627 03 OF 03 250749Z  
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07  
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15  
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INFO AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 3 OF 3 TEL AVIV 4627

REVIVED ITS HOPES AND PROSPECTS OF SOME DAY RETURNING TO POWER, WHEREAS THE PARTY LEADERS ARE ALL LOSERS. THE EXPECTED STRUGGLE FOR THE SECRETARY GENERALSHIP OF THE HISTADRUT MAY WELL BECOME POLITICALLY AND IDEOLOGICALLY MORE RADICALIZED. PRESSURES ARE COMING PARTICULARLY FROM THE KIBBUTZ AND MOSHAV MOVEMENTS AND THE YOUNG GUARD GROUP, WHO CLAIM THAT IT WAS THEIR TREMENDOUS ORGANIZATIONAL AND PHYSICAL EFFORT WHICH SUSTAINED THE ALIGNMENT MAJORITY IN THE HISTADRUT. THEY CHARGE THAT OTHER ELEMENTS CONTRIBUTED LITTLE TO EITHER THE KNESSET OR THE HISTADRUT ELECTION EFFORTS. THE SPOKESMEN OF THE KIBBUTZNIKS AND THE YOUNG GUARD NOW ASK AS THEIR REWARD A GREATER VOICE AND MORE JOBS EVEN BEFORE THE HISTADRUT CONVENTION IN SEPTEMBER ELECTS A NEW LEADERSHIP. THEY ALSO WANT A MILITANT ANTI-GOVERNMENT POLICY ORIENTATION. THEY WILL DEMAND STRONG RESISTANCE TO PACKAGE DEALS AND TO THE END OF SUBSIDIES, TAXATION OF KIBBUTZIM, OR ANY OTHER ECONOMIC MEASURE THEY CONSIDER UNFRIENDLY. THESE GROUPS ARE NOW MAKING COMMON CAUSE WITH MAPAM TO OPPOSE EFFORTS BY MORE MODERATE LABOR PARTY FORCES TO INDUCE THE DMC TO FORM AN ALIGNMENT WITH LABOR IN THE HISTADRUT. CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 TEL AV 04627 03 OF 03 250749Z

11. ALTHOUGH IT HAS BEEN OFFICIALLY DENIED, MESHEL WITH THE SUPPORT OF PERES AND GAD YA'ACOB I IS RELIABLY REPORTED TO HAVE OFFERED THE DMC A POSITION IN THE 22 MEMBER HISTADRUT EXECUTIVE BUREAU AND TO HAVE ASKED THEM TO FORM A COALITION WITH LABOR IN JERUSALEM IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN ALIGNMENT CONTROL OF THE JERUSALEM LABOR COUNCIL WHERE THE LABOR AND LIKUD VOTES ARE ABOUT EQUAL. BEHIND THIS OFFER LIES THE LARGER HOPE OF MANY LABOR LEADERS, THAT A LABOR-DMC COALITION COULD EVENTUALLY ENTICE THE LIBERAL PARTY AND LA'AM TO QUIT THE LIKUD AND TO FORM A NEW CENTER LEFT POLITICAL FORCE IF BEGIN'S FOREIGN POLICY TURNS INTO A DISASTER. ANOTHER CONSIDERATION IS THAT A LABOR-DMC ALIGNMENT IN THE HISTADRUT WOULD HELP STEM PRESSURES TOWARD RADICALIZATION. IT WOULD ALSO DETER DMC FROM JOINING FORCES IN THE PARLIAMENTARY ARENA WITH LIKUD EFFORTS TO

PUNISH HISTADRUT THROUGH HOSTILE LEGILATION.

12. SUCH A MOVE ON THE PART OF THE LABOR PARTY LEADERSHIP, HOWEVER, WOULD MILITATE AGAINST EFFORTS OF THE KIBBUTZNIKS AND MAPAM TO TURN HISTADRUT TOWARD THE LEFT IN ORDER TO SHOW BEGIN THAT EVEN THOUGH HE MAY CONTROL THE PARLIAMENTARY SCENE, IT IS LABOR THAT CONTROLS EXTRA-PARLIAMENTARY POLITICS AND CAN SQUEEZE THE ECONOMIC JUGULAR OF THE COUNTRY. THEY SEE IN OVERTURES TOWARD THE DMC THE THREAT TO DUMP THEM AND ARE THEREFORE RESISTING SUCH EFFORTS. THEY HAVE ALREADY WARNED MESHEL THAT THEY WOULD WITHDRAW THEIR SUPPORT FROM THE ALIGNMENT AND TAKE WITH THEM SOME 12-15 PERCENT OF THE VOTES, THUS LEAVING LABOR WITHOUT SUFFICIENT SUPPORT TO FORM A MAJORITY EVEN WITH THE DMC. THIS WOULD GREATLY UNDERMINE THE AUTHORITY OF THE HISTADRUT AND POSSIBLE  
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PAGE 03 TEL AV 04627 03 OF 03 250749Z

FORCE A CHANGE OF LEADERSHIP. WHETHER THEY WOULD ACTUALLY CARRY OUT SUCH A THREAT RATHER THAN SHARE THE COMMON FRUITS OF VICTORY REMAINS TO BE SEEN. IN THE MEANTIME MAPAM AND THE LEFT ARE INSISTING THAT AN ARAB BE GIVEN A SEAT ON THE 22 MEMBER EXECUTIVE BUREAU IN RECOGNITION OF THE ARAB CONTRIBUTION TO THE ALIGNMENT VICTORY. THIS, HOWEVER, WOULD MAKE APPORTIONMENT OF BUREAU SEATS EVEN MORE DIFFICULT.

13. THE NEW MILITANCY AND CONTROL OF A VOTING BLOC WHICH GIVES MAPAM AND THE KIBBUTZIM A DECISIVE BALANCE OF POWER COULD ALSO CREATE SERIOUS NEW LONG RANGE PROBLEMS FOR THE LABOR PARTY IN ADDITION TO THREATENING THE POSSIBILITY OF HISTADRUT-GOVERNMENT ACCOMMODATION. THE ASCENDANCY OF THIS BLOC COULD MEAN THAT THE SMALL MINORITY OF PRIVILEGED SETTLEMENT AND RURAL ORIENTED CADRES, MOSTLY OF EUROPEAN OR AMERICAN ORIGIN, WOULD HAVE A DECISIVE VOICE IN DETERMINING PRIORITIES AND THE FUTURE DIRECTION OF LABOR AND THE HISTADRUT, WITH ALL THE POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES OF A CONFRONTATION WITH THE LIKUD. THE LATTER MAY THEN TRY TO MOBILIZE THE URBAN AND UNDERPRIVILIGED SEPHARDIM BOTH ON AN IDEOLOGICAL AND ON AN ETHNIC SOCIAL BASIS. THIS TOO COULD BECOME A POTENTIALLY SERIOUS THREAT FOR THE POLITICAL STABILITY OF THE COUNTRY, AND WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY DRIVE THE SEPHARDIM TOWARD A MORE AGGRESSIVE NATIONALISTIC-RELIGIOUS POSITION.

4. ANOTHER SERIOUS PROBLEM FACING LABOR IS THE POTENTIAL RIVALRY AS TO WHO WILL DETERMINE HISTADRUT POLICY TOWARD THE GOVERNMENT. QUESTIONS ARE NOW BEING RAISED WHETHER MESHEL SHOULD NOT BE ASKED TO

STEP DOWN FROM THE SECRETARY GENERALSHIP AND YEILD  
TO SOMEONE LIKE ALLON OR YAACOBI. SINCE THE LABOR  
PARTY HAS NOT YET MADE A FINAL DECISON WHETHER MEMBERS  
CAN HOLD BOTH KNESSET SEATS AND MAJOR ELECTED PARTY  
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 TEL AV 04627 03 OF 03 250749Z

POSITIONS, MESHEL COULD STILL BE SUBJECTED TO PRESSURES  
TO CHOOSE ONE OR THE OTHER. HE IS 65 YEARS OLD AND  
WILL NOT BE ABLE TO RUN FOR A THIRD TERM IN THE HIS-  
TADRUT. THUS, HE MAY CHOOSE THE MORE TRANQUIL ROLE  
IN THE KNESSET. HOWEVER, THE UNEXPECTEDLY STRONG  
PRO-ALIGNMENT VOTE WILL NO DOUBT HAVE STRENGTHENED  
HIS DETERMINATION TO HOLD ON TO BOTH JOBS. AFTER  
ALL, UNLIKE ANY OTHER LABOR PARTY LEADER, HE CAN  
CLAIM A VICTORY. ACCORDING TO A MAPAM SOURCE, YIGAL  
ALLON, WHO COMES FROM THE LEFT WING ACHDUT AVODAH FACTION OF  
THE LABOR PARTY AND IS HIMSELF IDENTIFIED WITH THE  
KIBBUTZ MOVEMENT, IS TRYING TO BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN  
MAPAM, THE LEFT AND THE CENTER, ALLEGEDLY IN THE  
HOPE OF MANEUVERING HIMSELF INTO A POSITION TO REPLACE  
MESHEL.  
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